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Traditions and Themes in the Tagalog Novel

SOLEDAD S. REYES

To students trained in Western modes of criticism, especially the American dominated school of New Criticism, and armed with the necessary tools for judging Western works, the Tagalog novel will only evoke an uncomprehending stare. Given a novel like Lope K. Santos's *Banaag at Sikat* (1906), the student's patience will be tried severely by such a loosely structured and episodic plot, a gallery of vaguely defined characters, an abundance of authorial intrusion and apparently aimless discussions and other "flaws" which modern critics frown upon. Other Tagalog novels show fondness for "telling" rather than "rendering," coincidences and discoveries rather than causation in the development of the plot, explicit didacticism rather than the use of such techniques as "stream of consciousness" or complex point of view, and overly "sentimental" scenes rather than understatement, tension, or ironical treatment. Indeed, these characteristics present some difficulties for students equipped with critical notions from Percy Lubbock, Brooks and Warren, Ian Watt, and other modern critics. Subjecting the Tagalog novels to these norms which, after all, have been based on a critical study of Western novels, would not be exactly fair. Traditions that gave rise to the novel in England, America, or the other European countries are not necessarily the same ones that led to the rise of the Tagalog novel. Thus, there is a real need to study the Tagalog traditions, some possible influences, and antecedents, if only to create a perspective through which the Tagalog novel can be seen as the end result of many divergent forces at work in our literature. Only then can any real study of the development of the novel through the years gain significance.

THE LITERARY SITUATION PRIOR TO THE
RISE OF THE TAGALOG NOVEL

A cursory study of Tagalog literature will show that the novel as a genre appeared only at the turn of the twentieth century with the publication of Lope K. Santos' *Salawahang Pag-ibig* (1900) published in *Ang Kaliwanagan*.¹ In the preceding centuries, the literary scene was completely dominated by the following types: church-inspired narratives like the *pasion* and lives of saints, religious poetry, and the very popular *awit* and *corrido*, which were based on European medieval romances. Under the Spanish colonizers, the people had to make do with a steady diet of religious works, on the one hand, and escapist literature, on the other. Predictably enough, the religious pieces contained exhortations to the faithful, constantly reminding them of the existence of heaven and hell; for their part, the *awit* and *corrido* afforded the people the chance to escape into a world of fantasy, of unrequited love, of improbable situations. An agency given the sole right to determine which works should be printed was the Comisión Permanente de Censura (1858) which performed its function very carefully as safeguard of the people's morals.

It is no wonder then that when some writers decided to publish their novels, the reading public took to them rather enthusiastically. Here was definitely secular reading material, with an attempt to depict real situations and characters with whom the public could identify. The rise of the Tagalog novel was so phenomenal that by the second decade of the twentieth century, it had become the most popular form of literature.

Whether they appeared in serialized installments in the leading newspapers of the time, or printed in book form, these novels were read by the public who welcomed the change from the earlier works. In 1938, novelist-critic Iñigo Ed. Regalado even

1. Iñigo Ed. Regalado, *Ang Pagkaunlad ng Nobelang Tagalog* (Manila: Institute of National Language, 1939), p. 11. E. Arsenio Manuel in his *Dictionary of Philippine Biography* (1970) contends, however, that the first novel was written by Gabriel Beato Francisco, entitled *Cababalaghan ni P. Bravo*, and published in *Kapatid ng Bayan* (1899).

described the first two decades (1905–1921) as the “Golden Age of the Tagalog Novel”.² Mona P. Highley, in a monograph, compares the emergence of the novel to Minerva’s springing fullblown from the brow of Zeus.³

FACTORS WHICH GAVE RISE TO THE NOVEL

Both Regalado’s and Highley’s claims might be easily dismissed as excess of diction to which many critics in the vernacular are prone. Yet, one cannot but be impressed by the tremendous popularity that the novel gained for itself during those few years. Regalado himself gave the number of novels published between 1900 and 1938, the year he delivered his lecture, as 469 full-length novels.⁴ Teodoro Agoncillo’s own bibliography lists approximately 250 titles from 1900 to 1925.⁵ This is no mean feat for a genre that literally came into the literary scene out of nowhere.

Consequently, it would be interesting to study the factors that account for this spate of novel writing that dislodged certain traditional literary forms from the position of primacy they once enjoyed. Certain sociocultural forces could be cited to explain this burst of energy.

One crucial factor was the disappearance of the powerful Comisión de Censura with the change of government. Lope K. Santos, in his *Tinging Pahapaw sa Kasaysayan ng Panitikang Tagalog* (1938), attacked the debilitating influence of this censorship body. He blames the body for stifling the growth not only of native literature but also for preventing the dissemination of materials from Spain.⁶

This is not to say that no form of censorship existed during the American Occupation. But writers, to a limited extent, were

2. Regalado, *Pagkaunlad ng Nobelang Tagalog*, p. 16.

3. Mona P. Highley, *The Tagalog Novel* (unpublished mimeoscript, n. d.) p. 1.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 30–46.

5. Teodoro Agoncillo, *Tagalog Periodical Index* (Manila: Institute of National Language, 1953).

6. Lope K. Santos, *Tinging Pahapaw sa Kasaysayan ng Panitikang Tagalog* (Manila: Institute of National Language, 1938), pp. 16–17.

given freedom to experiment with a relatively new form. They could write on anything as long as these works were not deemed seditious. Thus the earliest novels dealt with innocuous subject matter ranging from the need for filial piety to unrequited love and all its attendant passions and emotions. Even the so-called novels with a distinctly strong historical flavor zeroed in on the cruelties of the Spaniards, on one hand, and the benevolence of the Americans, on the other, as in Roman Reyes' *Pusong Walang Pag-ibig* (1910) and Francisco Laksamana's *Anino ng Kahapon* (1907). Social consciousness, a marked literary strain, took the form of novels with an ideology propounded by socialist-oriented writers like Lope K. Santos, Faustino Aguilar and Juan Arsciwals. Agitation for independence from America, however, did appear in several novels, as it did in poetry and in the drama. When it did, not a few ripples were caused in the usually placid life of the people. But unlike some dramatists who were imprisoned for their "seditious" dramas,⁷ the Tagalog novelists who dared write against the United States remained relatively unscathed. Certainly the most fiery and passionately patriotic speeches of characters in the drama were matched by some episodes in such novels as Regalado's *Madaling Araw* (1909) and Faustino Aguilar's *Pinaglahuan* (1907). One can only surmise that the reason was that unlike the drama, which when staged became visual, the novel, to be understood, demanded knowledge of the language which the Americans did not possess during those years.

A more immediate factor, however, was the rise of journalism in the Tagalog-speaking regions. Newspapers founded during the last years of the Spanish period, and thus imbued with a nationalistic orientation, flourished into the American era. One such newspaper was *Ang Kapatid ng Bayan* (1899). According to Jose Esperanza Cruz, in his *Ang Pahayagang Tagalog* (1938), newspapers during the Spanish period published news about Spain, articles exhorting people to practise the faith, and the

7. Amelia Lapeña Bonifacio, *The "Seditious" Tagalog Playwrights: Early American Occupation* (Manila: Zarzuela Foundation of the Philippines, 1972).

rather ubiquitous lives of saints.⁸ *Patnubay ng Catolico* (1890) and *Ang Plihgong Tagalog* (1896) are examples of this type. Increasing secularism in the first decade of the American regime prompted some individuals to found their own newspapers. One added feature was the serialized novel, certainly a welcome change in the literary diet, as already indicated. Because the audience clamored for more of this novelty, the newspapers published more novels. Many of the earlier novels were serialized in such newspapers as *Kapatid ng Bayan* (1899) *Muling Pagsilang* (1902), *Liwayway* (1907), *Ang Mithi* (1910) and *Taliba* (1910). Regalado points out that people bought newspapers not really to read the news but to follow the serialized novels. These newspapers definitely contributed not only to the growth of the novel as a genre but even to the form it took: the episodic, loose structure of the novel can be partly traced to the fact that serialization forced the novelist to divide his novel into neatly compartmentalized sections that would insure continued patronage by an audience whose appetite had to be whetted constantly.

Newspapers were not the only outlets for the novelist. Printing which at one time had been largely the domain of the religious orders was gradually taken over by different commercial houses. Seeing how well received the serialized novels had been, owners of the printing presses took it upon themselves not only to print the novels in book form but to solicit openly novels not previously serialized. To encourage novelists to churn out more of the popular reading material, the owners were willing to pay the novelists from three to seven thousand pesos for each work. Several names stood out during those years as those responsible for the publication of the novels: Libreria Martinez, Libreria Pajario, Libreria P. Sayo, Imprenta Cultural Filipina, Limbagang Tagumpay and Limbagang Banahaw.

These factors, however, although important, cannot fully explain the emergence of the novel precisely at this period, for they merely touch on the extrinsic circumstances. Consequently,

8. Jose Esperanza Cruz, *Ang Pahayagang Tagalog* (Manila: Institute of National Language, 1938), pp. 11-16.

they still do not present a complete picture of the different reasons for the rise of the novel.

A closer look at the nature of the novel, of any novel for that matter, could probably help one in reconstructing the literary climate of a particular period. As stated earlier, the people were given very few choices when it came to literary pieces. Strictly speaking, most of those religious works — whether written in prose or poetry — could not qualify as creative literature, as they did not really require a lot of imagination in their creation. The other alternative to these devotional works was the metrical romances written in flowery language, dealing with romanticized situations that happened in a world peopled by characters that would strike the reader as unfamiliar. Both forms of writing therefore exuded an air of unreality about them; abstraction and pure romance abounded in these works.

In a novel, on the other hand, attempts are made to create characters and situations that closely approximate real life. The attempts vary according to the writers' apprehension of reality. One thing is certain, however; the people found in the novel a closer correspondence between life and art, something which they did not observe in all the other forms they were familiar with. The usual universal themes of love, fidelity, order, death, no longer appeared as abstractions in the guise of allegorical characters nor did these themes remain disembodied spirits in search of flesh and blood in the form of character and situations. For the first time, they were given a very concrete sequence of events that happened at specific periods to certain defined characters. Even the language they used was no longer the highly charged, flowery speech of the characters of *awit* and *corrido* nor was it the extremely didactic language of the religious works. This was language which ordinary people used in ordinary situations. Yet it is important to note that the tendency to be flowery was still there, and again one has to look into historical events to account for this "rhetorical" use of language evident in many Tagalog novels.⁹

9. Ian Watt, *Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California

To a limited extent, the language factor can be cited as a reason for the rise of the novel. Tagalog, the language of the masses, had always been the poor cousin during the colonial regime. It was only during the second half of the nineteenth century at the height of the Propaganda Movement that the language came to be recognized as possessing a certain potential. It is true that even before this time the language had been used in several prose works, notably *Barlaan at Josaphat* (1712) and *Urbana at Feliza* (1853) but these were religious works. In the hands of a Propaganda writer like Marcelo H. del Pilar, and revolutionaries like Andres Bonifacio and Emilio Jacinto, Tagalog was stripped of some of its poetic proclivity and romantic tone and forced to become a blunt weapon for propaganda. Religious topics for which Tagalog had been employed were replaced by distinctly secular concerns — protest against Spain and agitation for independence. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century Tagalog gained importance as the language of the revolution, the language of freedom and independence. Lope K. Santos, himself one of the earliest novelists, waxes rhapsodic over the tremendous possibilities inherent in Tagalog:

Sa liwanag ng mga nagaalab na isip at pusong bayaning nagpapakasakit nang mga taong iyon, ay nakalikha tayo ng isang panitikang may mga wasto nang pansulat, may maiimbulong nang diwa sa pagsasalita, may mga dakilang kasulatan at katibayan sa pagka-bansa, at nagkaisang wika nang batibot, matipuno at sagana sa mga salita, mga kalayaan, at saka ng pagkapoot at pagtutol sa pinagkamihasnang pag-aalipin.¹⁰

In the light of the inflamed minds and heroic hearts that were willing to suffer during those years, we were able to create a literature complete in itself, with loftily articulated thought, with great testaments and documents of nationhood, and a unified language of the strong; vigorous, sturdy and abounding in words, in freedom and a fierce hatred for and rebellion against the slavery to which we had been accustomed.

The coming of the Americans only served to stimulate this enthusiasm for the language. Now there was another language seeking to dominate it, English, and thus the need was created to prove to all and sundry that imaginative works can successfully

Press, 1959) p. 30. See his discussion on the difference between the referential and rhetorical use of language.

10. Santos, *Tinging Pahapaw sa Panitikang Tagalog*, p. 24.

embody indigenous experience through the medium of the native language. For many writers of the first decade, one function of literature was perpetually to enrich the language. This defensive gesture, the attempt to justify the use of Tagalog, was apparently behind the writer's use of Tagalog in a rhetorical and not in a referential manner. Frequently, therefore, one gets the impression that language was not being used to refer the reader to some concrete human experience, but was being employed for the sheer delight of exploring its nuances. The language of the earlier novels seemed uncomfortably stranded between the past and the present, between elaborate rhetoric and conversational ease. All this could appear to some Western critics as proof that the Tagalog novel is not really a novel when compared to English or American novels, for one characteristic of the English novel is its referential use of language. The point one should keep in mind is that early in the development of the novel, the writers had already and acutely grasped the importance of language in articulating the experiences of the people. The medium gave them the means with which to explore the different nuances of emotions, as well as the sets of values and beliefs subscribed to by the people.

This question of language — the striking similarity between the language used in the novel and that employed in the *awit* and *corrido* — will always crop up in the discussion of the relationship between the novel and the earlier forms. Furthermore, language is only one of the many areas where basic similarities can be discerned between the novel and some earlier forms of popular literature. Indeed, the novel cannot be taken as a *genre* that shows no affinities with the other literary types; it cannot be acclaimed as one literary type that sprung up full-blown without antecedents exerting some influence on its development.

SOME POSSIBLE ANTECEDENTS

Therefore, what must be done is to show the roots of native literary tradition from which the novel emerged. Certain works will have to be considered in an attempt to suggest possible influences that would be incorporated in the novel as a separate

genre. Consequently, these works will be discussed to show how the recurrence of certain motifs and certain narrative techniques are traceable to the earlier works. It is also important to note that certain tendencies exhibited by Tagalog novels in the twentieth century are not necessarily present in the novels of other countries.

One decisive influence were the Church-inspired narratives, consisting mostly in lives of saints. The best known work is *Barlaan at Josaphat*, translated into Tagalog by Antonio de Borja and published in 1712 under the full title of *Aral na tunay na totoong pagaacay sa tauo nang manga cabanalang gawa nang manga maloualhating santos na sina Barlaan at Josaphat*. The significance of this work lies primarily in its use of Tagalog prose, not verse, to tell the story of two men, one a prince and the other a hermit. During the earlier years, the use of written Tagalog had been limited to the religious poetry chiefly written by the missionaries. Needless to say, its most important function was didactic in nature.

In the tradition of the Renaissance guidebooks, or works written to serve as guides to different kinds of men, Fr. Modesto de Castro wrote his *Urbana at Feliza* in 1853. Written in the epistolary form, the work presents a series of letters between two sisters, Feliza, who stays home in Paombong, Bulacan, and her sister Urbana, who studies in Manila and who eventually enters a nunnery. Like the Renaissance books of manners, *Urbana at Feliza* is explicitly didactic as it attempts to show how one must conduct one's life in relation to others. The names of the two girls — Urbana meaning "urbane" and Feliza meaning "happy" — may well be illustrative of the belief that knowing how to deal with other people is tantamount to happiness.

Like the preceding work *Barlaan at Josaphat*, de Castro's work was also written in prose. But more important than this is the presence of a real story that is unfolded in the letters that the sisters write to each other, a story that includes practically everything crucial in the lives of the sisters: education, friendship, plans for life, and the death of a loved one. In the

same letters, one detects an attempt by the author to create characters situated in a particular setting, following particular mores, customs and traditions. Though quite naive, this work contains some attempts at realism. More than *Barlaan at Josaphat*, *Urbana at Feliza* can be seen as one factor that really initiated the development of the novel — in terms of plot, characters and the very ideas and beliefs that the later novels would exhibit profusely.

Another piece written to impart a moral lesson is Father Miguel Lucio y Bustamante's *Si Tandang Basio Macunat* (1885). At first glance, the story seems to be the narrator's story. But as the tale progresses, the reader realizes that Tandang Basio Macunat, an old man befriended by the narrator, has assumed the role of the storyteller. The manner of narration becomes more complicated as the reader is made to look over the shoulders of the two characters as they read the work written by Tandang Basio's father. The latter's story deals with the disastrous consequences of the little education that Proper, the son of a rich couple, had in Manila. The moral of the story, which comes out rather strongly is: Education for the *Indio* is an evil that breeds further evil. *Indios* must not strive to learn anything, especially Spanish, for they are much happier in their state of ignorance.

If one were to look for a possible source of the different manners of storytelling in the Tagalog novels within the framework of the native literary tradition one could probably point to *Si Tandang Basio Macunat* in its complex use of different points of view in rendering an experience. There is the use of the "I" as point of view, the use of letters to further the action of the story, the use of a minor character as the filter through which the story is told. Its significance does not derive from this alone, however; this slight volume gives the impression of a real plot, vivid characterization, and the use of conversation to further the action, which in turn gives the characters relative freedom to reveal themselves dramatically without any authorial intrusion.

The didactic strain characterizing the various prose narratives was more pronounced in two works written in verse: (1) the

pasion, a narration of Biblical incidents, and (2) *Martir sa Golgota* (1886), a translation by Juan Evangelista of the Spanish novel *El Martir del Golgota* written by Enrique Escrich. Years of contact with the various versions of the pasion (Gaspar Aquino de Belen, Pilapil, and de la Merced) during Lent have moulded the Filipino mind into a frame that constantly looks for lessons in the lives of these Biblical characters and their particular relevance to the lives of the people. What is the pasion but a constant exhortation to the faithful to be like Christ? *Martir sa Golgota*, on the other hand, despite the shorter span of time in which the people read it, influenced the writers in the kind of subject matter, the plot, and characters, in the novels serialized during the Lenten season. Under such convergent influences found at every turn, any genre arising during the later period cannot really escape the tradition of didacticism.

Certainly as evidenced in this brief study of the antecedents, the writers, secular or religious, succeeded not only in making literature an effective instrument for the evangelization of the natives but also in making sure that all forms of published material were didactic in nature and intent. Trained therefore to look for a moral injunction in every religious work they read, the Filipinos could not but look for some instruction even in later secular works like the awit and corrido, even as they were conditioned to look at life reflected in the secular works as a perpetual battle between good and evil.

In addition to this didactic strain, there is one other important tendency discernible in these tales, namely, sentimentality — an excessive wallowing in emotion not commensurate to the initial action that triggered this particular reaction. It comes in various guises but is always accompanied by the penchant for abstraction. Very often, the reason for the emotion remains vague and undefined. Rather than attempt to objectify it in terms of concrete images and situations, the writer often resorts to a deliberate marshalling of related emotions and attendant passions and lets the persona languish and linger over these abstract feelings. What is presented is a world viewed subjectively through the character who is undergoing some experience. When

abstraction abounds, sentimentality comes in its wake. Whether it is the faithful mired in sin or a lover in search of a beloved, the same sentimental tendency exists. This strain is exhibited not only in the impassioned speeches of the characters; it informs even the way situations are described — the manner characters are made to undergo innumerable sufferings, the very detailed description of atmosphere bathed in unspeakable gloom and desolation. In the metrical tales, copious tears are shed, sighs and moans are never stilled and objectification of the reason for the romantic agony is glossed over.

FLORANTE AT LAURA AND THE ROMANTIC TEMPER

Perhaps no other work can be used to exemplify all these characteristics and strains operative in the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries better than Francisco Baltazar's *Florante at Laura*, the only long narrative poem of the nineteenth century. Sentimentality reaches a new height as the poet describes the plight of two lovers who must face almost insurmountable obstacles before love is made to triumph. In stanza after stanza, the poet makes his character, Florante, recount all the agony he has encountered at the hands of the enemy Conde Adolfo and even from his beloved Laura, who in a fit of rage he accuses of infidelity. Tied to a tree, he piteously cries and deafens heaven with his lamentations. The very situation narrated in the poem, that of a nobleman and a princess forced to undergo travails and anguish, lends itself very well indeed to a sentimental treatment. In countless novels written later on, the same situation would be depicted to such an extent that it would probably not be unfair to call Florante and Laura the supreme archetypes of lovers in the Tagalog novel.¹¹

In his essay mentioned earlier, *Ang Pagkaunlad ng Nobelang Tagalog*, Regalado advances another of his beliefs concerning the novel and the romance. He asserts that there exist no major differences between the romance and the novel; the only dis-

11. Bienvenido Lumbera, "Literary Relations of Tagalog Literature," *Brown Heritage* ed. Antonio P. Manuud (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1967), p. 327.

cernible point of divergence is that the novel uses prose rather than verse.¹² This contention is highly indicative of the manner in which the later novelists viewed their works and can serve as an index to the critical thinking of the writers themselves. A study of the early novels shows the pervasive influence of the *awit* and *corrido*. There is the same episodic plot, the same stereotyped characters, the same wallowing in excessive emotions, the same motif of search or quest either for the beloved or for some fantastic adventure, the series of coincidences and revelations that tend to tax the imagination, the neat ending, the inevitable leitmotif of the hero proving himself, the same obsession with honor. Certainly, stripped of their trappings, some of the early novels seem to be romances written in prose. To make the similarity more glaring, there is a blurring of distinction in the language used, since the quality of the prose closely approximates that of poetry, as seen in the novels of Regalado and Roman Reyes.

If one is to look for a matrix which has given birth to and nurtured ideas that found their way into the novel, one has to point to *Florante at Laura* as one significant work that has crystallized the romantic tendencies of the past centuries. More than any other work of the nineteenth century, Balagtas' poem has been responsible for the perpetuation of certain romantic beliefs. By romantic is meant a deliberate withdrawal from the real world into a world of fantasy peopled by idealized characters confronting improbable situations which somehow turn out for the better in most romances. In this poem, one discerns the romantic temper with its almost obsessive preoccupation with love, with individual agony and ecstasy, with motifs and characters drawn from medieval romance. Even the Shelleyan concept of the poet as sage is evident in the poem that seems to come out with a nugget or two of wisdom at every turn. In this sense, therefore, the poet is seen to have assumed the role of a teacher, a function which was filled earlier by the missionaries. Like the prose works discussed earlier, the poet manages to deliver a

12. Regalado, *Pagkaunlad ng Nobelang Tagalog*, p. 6.

homily in poetic verse on such varied topics as love, filial piety, patriotism, the proper upbringing of children, and other subject matter close to the heart of the Filipino sage-poet.

NOLI AND FILI AND THE REALISTIC TEMPER

Romanticism never exhausted itself fully. Years after Baltazar's death, on into the twentieth century, writers still throw accolades at the poet and his celebrated work. But for the novel to rise as a unique genre, certain conditions had to be fulfilled. In other countries, like England and America, the novel emerged as one end-product of the realistic movement. By realism is meant a deliberate emphasis on the commonplace and on recognizable aspects of everyday life, an attempt to show verisimilitude in terms of place and time, a way of looking at life that is grounded on some concrete, not universal, occurrences. In realism, time is flowing, a place is defined, the characters are recognizable as real, situations happen because of causation.

Of the works written in the nineteenth century, only Rizal's novels would qualify as works pervaded with a realistic temper. Both *Noli Me Tangere* (1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (1891) were a vivid reflection of society as it was during the nineteenth century. His mythical San Diego is nothing but a reflection of his own hometown, Calamba. The characters he creates resemble people his readers knew in real life. It is interesting to point out that certain characters in Rizal's novels constantly appear in various guises in the Tagalog novels. Such characters as the passive Ibarra, the revolutionary Simoun, the timid Maria Clara, the old and wise Tasyo, the renegade priest Damaso, the suffering mother Sisa, the colonial Doña Victorina, the faithful Isagani, and a host of other types abound in the early novels like *Anino ng Kahapon*, *Madaling Araw*, *Pusong Walang Pag-ibig* and *Isa Pang Bayani*.

The whole structure of colonial Philippines provides the framework for both novels; deliberately and consciously, the writer chose to immerse himself in the mainstream of contemporary life as he records in an imaginative manner the

experiences of a people in a particularized period and milieu. He does not do it — this chronicle — objectively; on the contrary, he reconstructs the different stages of a people's final awakening in a manner which leads one to conclude that in the novels, literature is being used as a vehicle for satire. The object of the satire is a whole system that seeks to exploit the people and perpetuate injustice and suffering. In this notion of novel as instrument for social change, Rizal seems to be merely following the tradition of didacticism. In Rizal's novels, therefore, realism and satire seem to go hand in hand. Realistic details are furnished not merely to help the reader imagine a definite world and time; realism goes further than merely objectifying the experience. As illustrated in the novels, realism inevitably presents distortions and exaggerations for the more basic purpose of transformation of that corrupt society. Realism, in the first novels, always had a social dimension; the novel's effect is gauged not on the basis of the sheer entertainment it provides but on the fidelity demanded from it in its portrayal of native experience.

TWO MAIN THEMES: LOVE AND COUNTRY

What emerges from this brief study is that, underlying some irreconcilable differences in perspective, apprehension of reality, manner of translating vision of life into art, is one basic similarity: the notion that literature should be didactic in intent. Both the narrative poem and the novel in Spanish never for a moment lost sight of what is conceived as the basic function of literature. The decade that separates Rizal's *El Filibusterismo* and the first novel, *Salawahang Pag-ibig* could not have been enough to erase from the consciousness not only of the writers but of the audience as well this belief about literature.

In the Tagalog novels, two themes are always bound to come up. These are love and country. Variations on them are infinite, as is to be expected. For after all, these themes are not the exclusive domain of the Tagalog novel. But in perspective, one is struck by the realization that these two themes are precisely the ones used in the significant nineteenth-century works: *Florante and Laura* with its treatment of unrequited love,

and Rizal's novels, which depict the need for social consciousness, whether based on reform represented by Ibarra or total overhaul of the system symbolized by Simoun. Both themes actually interact, merge, and fuse in the works, but certainly one overshadows the other in each. It is unthinkable to conceive of Baltazar's poem as pure literature of protest; for that matter it would be a gross injustice to Rizal to call his novels love stories.

In perspective, therefore, one should look at these sensibilities — the romantic and the realistic — as two literary streams that created an impact on the subsequent development of the Tagalog novel. It is possible that at some points, the two merged into one, and yet it is important to view them as two separate movements springing from two sets of factors. This is important to note because in the study of the Tagalog novels, it is too easy to dismiss the works as purely romantic, or to question the "realism" that certain novels show.

SOME CRITICAL CONCEPTS

Any study of the Tagalog novel demands an understanding of some basic critical norms that Tagalog critics and novelists have formulated themselves so that a framework can be used against which the novels will be analyzed. In this section, attempts will be made to show how steeped the novelists-critics were in the traditions earlier crystallized in the nineteenth century. In the various prefaces, introductions and afterwords in the different Tagalog novels, one can extract certain ideas common to many novelists and critics regarding the following critical beliefs: 1) the nature of the novel; 2) the functions of a novelist; 3) the relationship between language and literature; 4) the relationship between the novel and its reader. For lack of any sustained body of critical writing, one is necessarily forced to avail himself of brief explanations the novelists themselves have written regarding their own works. This is especially important if one is to understand the first two periods in the development of the novel: the so-called "Golden Age" (1905—1921) and what critics have called its "decline" (the novel after 1921).

For a working definition of the novel, one must go to Iñigo Ed. Regalado's influential essay "Kasaysayan ng Nobelang Tagalog," for in it is contained one of the very few definitions of the novel as formulated by one who was himself a practitioner of the craft. He says:

... ang nobela ay bunga ng panitik ng isang manunulat na naglalarawan ng buong kabuhayan o bahagi ng isang buhay na hiniyasan ng mga bagay na nangyari o maaring mangyari, na ang layon ay magbinhi ng mga simulain o aral na hangad na pagbungahin o magdulot ng aliw sa mga mangbabasa sa pamamagitan ng magandang paglalarawan ng mga gawi o galaw sa pamumuhay o maglahad kaya ng isang panganib o sama na nakakalasan ng kagandahang asal upang maiwasan at malayuan.¹³

... the novel is the result of a writer's craft, which mirrors a complete life or aspects of it, replete with events that happened or could happen, and whose purpose is to sow principles or lessons meant to bear fruit or bring about pleasure in the readers through a pleasing depiction of life manners, and mores, or a description of danger or evil that could be avoided by good moral conduct, so that these can be avoided and shied away from.

Accordingly, the following elements compose a novel: a) a description of life or aspects of life dealing with events that actually happened or could happen; b) a two-fold purpose: 1) to inculcate principles which the author hopes will bear fruit, and 2) to give pleasurable enjoyment through vivid description of manners and movements of life.

The novel is seen, therefore, as a vehicle to point out the vices and follies to which man must not fall prey. In a more positive vein, it must show the path to goodness and righteousness through characters and situation. This blatant didactic function of the novels springs from the role assumed by the novelist. He is a man who enriches the spirit and thought of the race, who moulds the manners of a people and who illumines the reader through his comments on life.¹⁴ In the novelist, the poet-sage in Baltazar's poem is resurrected.

A cursory reading of the *Pagpapakilala* or critical prefaces of the novels during the first two decades shows how conscious the novelists were of their function as teachers and guides. In

13. Regalado, *Pagkaunlad ng Nobelang Tagalog*, p. 6.

14. *Ibid.*

Valeriano Hernandez Peña's *Dangal ng Magulang* (1920), one reads the following:

Umaasa nga akong ang aklat na ito'y kapupulutan nang ating mga bata ng kagandahang asal na magiging puhunan nila sa pamumuhay sa bayang kahapishapis.¹⁵

It is my hope that from this book our youth will derive norms for good conduct that will serve them in good stead in this our suffering country.

Juan Arsciwals in his *Isa Pang Bayani* (1915) gives his reason for writing his socially conscious novel in these words:

... at ang nagudyok sa akin sa ganito ay ang sa mula'y mula pa'y magandang nais na makita sa lalong madali ang nagliliwayway ng ganap na katubusan ng mga manggagawang Pilipino, maging anoman ang halaga ng katubusang ito.¹⁶

... and what prompted me to this action was a long cherished dream to see as soon as possible the dawn of complete liberation of the Filipino laborer, whatever be the cost.

To re-create the realities of the Spanish atrocities so that the youth could profit from the past is Francisco Laksamana's avowed purpose in writing his only novel, *Anino ng Kahapon* (1907):

... Ibig kong sabihin na di pa umaabot ng ikasampung bahaging nasalaysay dito ang mga tunay na pinangyarihan. Datapwa, marahil at di lihis ang pag-asa ko na kahit bahid na bahid lamang ng kahapon, ang kathang ito'y makakatulong din sa kabataang di umabot sa mga araw na nasabi at makapaglalagak ng munting alaala doon sa kapanahunang malungkot ng kapilipinuhan.¹⁷

... I would like to say that what has been narrated here does not even approximate one-tenth of the real events. However, it is my fervent hope that even if this be merely a faint trace of the past, this novel will help the youth who never lived in those days, and will retain in memory that sorrowful past of our people.

Other prefaces content themselves with defining the writers' purpose in writing their novels. Two excerpts show variations on the same purpose: to reiterate the significance of Tagalog. In *Maginang Mahirap* (1905), Valeriano Hernandez Peña in perhaps

15. Valeriano Hernandez-Peña, *Dangal ng Magulang* (Manila: Bahay Palimbayan ni P. Sayo Balo ni Soriano, 1920), p. 3.

16. Juan Arsciwals, *Isa Pang Bayani* (Manila: Imprenta y Libreria de P. Sayo vda. de Soriano, 1915), p. x.

17. Francisco Laksamana, *Anino ng Kahapon* (Manila: E. P. McCullough Press, 1907), n.p.

one of the earliest articulations of the importance of Tagalog says:

Isang aklat na ngayo'y matutunghan nang babasa, aklat na walang ibang layon kundi padakilain ang sariling wika, iyang wikang ngayon lamang nagkakahalaga at minamahal palibhasa'y itinuturo sa atin ng bagong panahon na ang wika ang kaluluwa ng lahi.¹⁸

This is a book which will be open to the reader's perusal, a book which has no other purpose but to make the native language great, that language that is slowly coming into its own and being loved, because it is this new era that teaches us that language is the soul of the race. Understandably enough, his statement exhibits justifiable pride in the renewed interest in the language. Juan Arsciwals in *Lalaking Uliran o Tulisan* (1914) describes the immeasurable joy he feels in using Tagalog:

... subalit isang malaking ligaya ko nang itinuturing na, ang tatlong kasaysayang nasabi ay maging isang dalisay na tanda ng aking paggalang at pagmamahal sa matamis na wikang Tagalog na pinagsisikapang mapalago at mapagpyaman ng mga samahang natatag na . . .¹⁹

... but it is a great joy to me that the three stories mentioned could become a pure sign of my respect and love for the sweet Tagalog language which different established associations have striven to promote and enrich. As stated earlier, one reason for the proliferation of the novels is this attempt by early writers to explore fully the possibilities inherent in the language.

Another interesting critical tendency is to look at literature's function in terms of evocation of pleasure. This is done through the use of beautiful words to express lofty thoughts and sentiments. Regalado holds in contempt those writers who attempt to economize with words. This practise he considers bad art.

Ngunit para sa pitak na pang Literatura, habang may maiindayog na isipan, habang may maririkit na pananalita at ayos sa isinusulat, ang katha ay lalong nagiging mainam at makabuluhan. Isipin natin na ang Literatura ay sumasaklaw sa Retorica at ang Retorica ay *ars bene dicendi*, o sining ng magandang pangungusap.²⁰

But for literary works, as long as there are lofty thoughts, as long as beautiful words and patterns are being written, the work becomes better

18. Valeriano Hernandez Peña, *Maginang Mahirap* (Manila: Limbagang Fajardo, 1905), p. 3.

19. Juan Arsciwals, *Lalaking Uliran o Tulisan* (Manila: Limbagan at Aklatan ni P. Sayo bala ni Soriano, 1914), p. VI.

20. Regalado, *Pagkaunlad ng Nobelang Tagalog*, p. 21.

and more significant. Let us keep in mind that rhetoric is under the scope of literature, and rhetoric is *ars bene dicendi*, or the art of beautiful speech.

Language therefore should be used to arouse certain pleasurable emotions and present well thought out ideas that will move and inspire the reader in his daily intercourse with his fellow men.

But pleasure is also evoked if the events are arranged in an orderly manner and if characters are delineated in such a way that the readers will comprehend the experience and identify with it. From these vicarious experiences, the reader will be able to mull things over and thus gain a deeper understanding of life. Macario Adriatico's foreword to Lope K. Santos's *Banaag at Sikat* (1906) exemplifies this belief in the two-fold function of literature:

Ang *Banaag at Sikat* ay hindi masasabing isang pagkakatagni-tagni lamang ng sarisaring salaysayin: hindi nga, ang bawat bahagi niya ay isang pamukaw ng damdamin at paliwanag sa isip, kaya nga di nagkasya ang kumatha na pawilihin lamang ang mga mambabasa sa maririkit na pananalita o sa pagsasalaysay ng mga maligayang udyok o handog sa buhay, kundi mahahanay ang mga mahahalagang suliraning dapat litisin at bigyang pasya upang maging palatuntunang dapat sundin sa ikapagtatanim sa lalong maginhawa, kundi man ng maligayang pamumuhay.²¹

It cannot be said that *Banaag at Sikat* is a mere enumeration of different stories: indeed it is not, for each of its parts arouses the emotions and enlightens the mind; thus the author did not content himself with merely entertaining the readers through beautiful phrases or narrating happy impulses or praising life, but presents the important problems to be studied and solved so that they can become a program of action to be followed to bring about a better, if not necessarily a happier life.

This excerpt from the foreword can very well sum up the various critical beliefs prevalent during the time. Perhaps more than Regalado's definition, Adriatico's statement really clarifies the notions that conditioned the minds of the writers during that time: the didactic strain, the importance of rhetorical language, the need to cater both to the emotion and the intellect of the reader, with the latter faculty given more prominence. It is through the intellect that readers can apprehend the reality being depicted in the novel in such a way that they can see the

21. Macario Adriatico, "Paunawa" in *Banaag at Sikat* by Lope K. Santos (2nd edition; Manila: Manlapaz Publishing Company, 1959), p. 11.

novel's direct bearing on life. Given such functions, therefore, the novel cannot help but present not only what is, but what should be, whether implicitly or explicitly.

SEVENTY YEARS OF THE TAGALOG NOVEL

A cursory reading of illustrative Tagalog novels from the 1900's to the present shows how closely the novel as a genre has hewed to the traditions, themes, and literary conventions found in the earlier works. Indeed, the course taken by the novel in seventy years suggests how pervasive and deep-seated have been the influences of the previous types of literature: the awit and corrido, the religious works, the novels in Spanish. The two streams — the romantic and the realistic — have in various degrees remained operative in the novels. From the realistic stream have come novels immersed in the mainstream of contemporary life, dealing with issues and events that have inevitable repercussions on the life of the whole community. Furthermore, this tendency has encouraged the view of the novel as an instrument for social comments that have bearing not only on the life of two people in love but on the life of society. On the other hand, many other novels seem to have drawn sustenance from the tradition crystallized in *Florante at Laura*. How else does one account for the exaggerated poses of lovers as they pine for the beloved, the brooding air of melancholy and distress, the plot that calls for violent separations of lovers, the atmosphere of unreality that hovers as characters languish over their private miseries and woes, the generally stereotyped manner of portraying characters and other traits that could only have been influenced by the romantic tradition?

The following discussion will focus on certain representative novelists and their works in so far as the latter can serve as illustration of how the two major themes — love and country — have been embodied. The first period, conveniently labelled the "Golden Age," will cover the years 1905 to 1921. The year 1922 will be used to signal the beginning of the second period which ends in 1944. The third period begins in 1945 and extends to the present.

This kind of periodization is rather arbitrary, as the following discussion will show. It would have been more valid to look at the history of the Tagalog novel as one uninterrupted movement — basically romantic — with the realistic tradition asserting itself at some crucial points in the novel's development.

THE "GOLDEN AGE" (1905—1921)

More than any other period of the Tagalog novel, the first two decades show closest affinity to the traditions discussed earlier. With almost no foreign works to fall back on for possible influences, the early Tagalog novelists sought to embody the two main themes that could have been culled from the two major works: Balagtas' narrative poem on love and Rizal's novels on country. The influence was so strong that writers seemed to write their novels with a preconceived notion that these themes and their various ramifications were the only significant and fitting materials for their novels. Writers did not write exclusively on one theme and in many instances, appeared to straddle two worlds. A particularly good example is Lope K. Santos. His *Salawahang Pag-ibig* (1900), generally recognized as the first Tagalog novel, predictably has love as a theme. In 1907 he wrote another novel, *Banaag at Sikat*, with the love angle assuming minor importance in comparison to the delineation of labor-capital conflict. What is interesting to note is that as early as the first years of the twentieth century, these two themes had already become dominant preoccupations of the novels.

How is love treated in the novels? Certain generalizations can be made. In many cases, the plots used to present the theme are rather stereotyped. One predictable pattern consists of a plot line featuring a girl who is torn between two men. The girl loves one of them, usually poor but honest and faithful, but the parents favor the other, because he is rich and has had some education. Obedience to parents' wishes is not only laudable, but it is considered the sacred duty of a child to obey her parents, who after all are God's representatives here on earth. Obedience also portends good fortune for the child. This is clearly

the central thesis in Valeriano Hernandez Peña's *Nena at Neneng* (1904) and Juan Arsciwals' *Luha Ng Makasalanan* (1919).

More common is a variation on the same pattern. A young man meets a young woman, usually during a social affair — a party, picnic, or coronation ball — and they fall in love. Obstacles take the form of either violent parental opposition or the presence of a third party. In some cases, opposition is surmounted after pails of tears and innumerable letters; the couple then live happily ever after, as in Precioso Palma's *Naglahong Tala* and Jose Villamor's *Ang Pagibig at ang Babaye* (1908). Very often, the story ends unhappily in a cemetery with the lover grieving over the death of the beloved. Such endings are found in Regalado's *Ang Huling Pagluha* (1911), Roman Reyes' *Luha at Pagibig* (1905), and Ramon Morales' *Panibugho* (1917). It is interesting to point out the typical romantic stance taken by the lover that parallels the stance of Florante weeping over the alleged unfaithfulness of Laura.

Love, in most cases, is highly idealized. Love is instantaneous; there is nothing cerebral about it. One reads typical examples of lovers fondly recalling their first sight of each other. Note the conventional images:

Sa buhay ng tao'y may mga pangyayaring hindi maaring malimot. Ang pagkakatama ng aking paningin noon kay Florandi ay siyang unang pangyayaring sa aking gunita'y hindi maparam . . . Ngunit napuna kong si Florandi ay patalilis na pumanhik, samantalang ako'y naiwang ang puso'y dumamdang ng isang di-pangkaraniwang tibok. Ang mga tibok na ito sa puso'y noon ko lamang naramdaman, at marahil ay iyon ang unang tibok na nahihinggil sa pag-ibig.²²

In a man's life there are some unforgettable moments. That time I caught sight of Florandi is the first moment which will never fade from my memory . . . But I noticed that Florandi swiftly ran into the house, and I was left with a heart fiercely pounding. I felt those heartbeats for the first time in my life, probably the first heartbeats concerned with love. Even the description of the girl is idealized, illustrative of the combined influence of Balagtas' *Florante at Laura* and Father de Castro's *Urbana at Feliza*. She is always beautiful, modest, chaste, and faithful. She is the Tagalog maiden.

22. Iñigo Ed. Regalado, *Ang Huling Pagluha* (Manila: Ilaya Press, 1933), p. 29.

A premium is placed on a woman whose reputation remains untarnished. Consequently, once a woman loses this (many novels show an inordinate preoccupation with such characters), she is trampled upon by society. Angry chords are struck by some novelists as they take up the cudgels for the fallen woman. In several novels, the writers themselves take to the defense of these women — unwed mothers, prostitutes, cabaret dancers, and mistresses — and in so doing unleash their fury against a hypocritical society. This ramification of the love theme is treated in such disparate novels as Aguilar's *Busabos ng Palad* (1907), perhaps the first compassionate treatment of a disgraced woman in Tagalog literature, Regalado's *May Pagsinta'y Walang Puso* (1921), a penetrating psychological study of a "kalunya" (mistress); Arsciwals's *Luha ng Makasalan* (1919), the story of an apparently respectable woman who plies her trade at night. A definite influence is *Camille* by Alexander Dumas, translated by Gerardo Chanco as *Ginto sa Lusak* in 1918. The woman of ill-repute is romanticized in these novels; the motif of "the prostitute with the golden heart" seems to have exerted a strong fascination for the writers.

Three kinds of loves can be discerned: the love between a young man and a young woman before marriage, the love between husband and wife, and the clandestine "love affair" indulged in outside the institution of marriage. The literature of those years reveals that the novelists appear to be at their romantic best in the depiction of the courtship stage: scenes, characters, situations are all charged with an air of unreality and romance. But once the lovers have settled into placid, domestic life, the novelists turn their attention to more mundane things such as earning a living and bringing up children. This is where the didactic strain comes in strongly. Love, at this point, is shown as essentially service to the other: the spouse and the children. It is in the third group of novels that love is not depicted as merely the private concern of two people; here society is involved because very often it is this institution and its rigid code of conduct that forces a woman to become an outsider, a marginal creature.

Thus men who find themselves in love with these women

also find that they have a real and pressing problem. Does one risk society's scorn to achieve personal happiness? In many novels, love triumphs in the end only after much soul-searching. Celso in *Busabos ng Palad* (1907) wrestles with himself as he thinks of the dire consequences of living with Rita, a prostitute:

Ang pag-ibig kailanma'y dakila at malinis, kung ang pagsisisi'y ikinakalas sa kasalanan, ang pag-ibig ay humuhugas sa anumang dungis. Ako'y umiibig kay Rita at ang isang umiibig ay walang muni-muni ng sarili, hindi nagpupuna sa bulung-bulungan. Ang tunay na pag-ibig ay di nangangailangan ng pagkalugod ng marami.²³

Love is noble and pure, when contrition comes after sin; love cleanses any stain. I love Rita and one who loves does not think of self, does not listen to gossip. True love has no need for the approval of others.

Love then in these novels acquires a social dimension. Society is exposed as responsible for the perpetuation of guilt feelings.

So far, the picture that emerges is a veritable gallery of love-sick heroes and heroines, self-righteous parents, individuals exiled from society because of love, an unending cavalcade of thinly disguised plots that unfold the same time-tested formulas for love stories. Many novelists certainly tried their hand at these kinds of novels. One consequently gets the impression that the literature must be terribly anemic and lacklustre, lacking in verve and vigor. This, however, is only one part of the picture, a very substantial part, but nevertheless still an incomplete picture of the first two decades.

It is when the novel zeroes in on contemporary life — living and dynamic because of tension between certain forces — that the novel is best seen to exhibit a great deal of social realism. In these novels, the writers take great pains to particularize time and place, succeed fairly well in creating believable characters and relatively tightly knit plots. Although such novels as *Pinaglahuan*, *Banaag at Sikat*, *Anino ng Kahapon*, and *Madaling Araw* (1909), manifest preoccupation with the theme of love, they nevertheless give the impression that love is made secondary to the overriding social consciousness. An examination of different aspects of these novels will reveal the extent to which the

23. Faustino Aguilar, *Busabos ng Palad* (Manila: Manila Filatelica, 1907), p. 55.

relationship between man and society, earlier seen in Rizal's novels, informs the total design of the novels.

Still reeling from the effects of two major wars — the Revolution and the Filipino-American War — many writers chose to depict the last decades of the Spanish period and the atrocities committed not only by the Spaniards themselves but also by their native subalterns. In varying degrees, the novelists are able to weave into the fabric of their story incidents that merely reinforce the image Filipinos have of the Spaniards: arrogant, cruel exploiters and hated colonizers. The Revolution and even minor skirmishes between Spaniards and Katipuneros often play a prominent part in the novels, as in Isabelo de los Reyes' *Ang Singsing ng Dalagang Marmol* (1912), Patricio Mariano's *Ang Bunga ng Nalantang Bulaklak* (1908), and Roman Reyes' *Pusong Walang Pag-ibig* (1910).

Receiving their share of denunciation are the different religious orders. This deliberate attempt to discredit these orders is understandable in the light of the strong anti-clericalism which started during the Propaganda Movement of the nineteenth century. In novel after novel, Faustino Aguilar and Juan Arsciwals manage to place the friars in a bad light. Aguilar's *Busabos ng Palad* has a whole chapter devoted to a savage commentary against the hypocrisy and utter stupidity of the priest called to minister to the dying Riya. In *Sa Ngalan ng Diyos* (1911), the Jesuits are portrayed as greedy and cunning men who were responsible for the tragic end of the heroine whose wealth they finally inherit. The avenger, Eladio Resurreccion, envisions a conflagration that will devour their church.

It would be a gross mistake to think that the Filipinos were blind to the very real presence of the Americans. In his *Madaling Araw*, Regalado makes Juan Galit a prophetic figure who foresees the final victory of the Filipinos over the Americans. He exhorts the people to be vigilant, to give up their pursuit of personal happiness, to struggle hard to achieve victory.

Iwan natin ang madlang kaaliwan ng sarili. Tumungo tayo sa kaginhawahan ng lahat. Ang ganda at bango ng mga talulot ng bulaklak ay di nakagaganap ng katubusan; kung tunay mang nakalilikha ng pag-ibig sa

puso'y lalong tunay namang nakapagpapalimot sa pag-ibig sa mga bayaning yumao. Isaisang tabi natin ang mga bulaklak na iyon. Bayaan nating mangalanta't mangatuyo. Sa ibabaw nila'y naroroon ang ating Dakilang Mithi! Ito ang ating unahin . . . Oo, nasa madaling araw pa lamang tayó — bagamat lumipas na ang kasungitan ng gabi.²⁴

Let us leave personal comforts behind. Let us move towards well-being for all. The beauty and the fragrance of a flower's petals cannot bring about salvation; even though it can arouse love in the heart, its heady fragrance can also make us forget our love for our fallen heroes. Let us lay those flowers aside. Let them wither and die. Above them beckons our Noble Desire! Let this be our first commitment. . . . Yes, we are still in the dawn — although the night's stormy weather has passed.

It is not only political emancipation that Filipinos demand. More pernicious because more subtle is economic dependence and its attendant evils. Santiago Flores' *Katalik Laan* (1913), a novel that depicts the nature of economic strangulation, and Aguilar's *Pinaglahuan* present a vivid picture of some American businessmen conspiring with local government officials to perpetuate the country's economic dependence on the United States.

One other form of social consciousness, perhaps the clearest strain, deals with the struggle between labor and capital. This preoccupation springs primarily from the novelists' own involvement with the labor movement, activated with the founding of Isabelo de los Reyes' Labor Party in 1901. Many writers at that time were also articulate labor leaders, like Lope K. Santos, Carlos Ronquillo, Juan Arsciwals, Faustino Aguilar, and Pascual Poblete, to name a few. It is in these socially conscious novels of the first decades that the reader detects the presence of certain traits found in Rizal's novels: the use of literature for protest, the high degree of realism, the depiction of experience participated in by a great number of people. It is also in such novels as Aguilar's *Pinaglahuan*, Santos' *Banaag at Sikat*, Regalado's *Madaling Araw* and Juan Arsciwals' *Isa Pang Bayani* (1915) that the novel seems to have attained a great deal of significance not only as a faithful reflection of the movements of contemporary life but also as a vivid illustration of how the novelist, given certain areas of experience, can shape and mould

24. Iñigo Ed. Regalado, *Madaling Araw* (Manila: Limbagan at Aklatan ni I. R. Morales, 1909), p. 365.

them in an imaginative and realistic manner, without losing sight of his role as teacher and guide.

Pinaglahuan exemplifies what has been earlier stated. It is the story of Luis Gatbuhay who loses faith in religion and money, both of which have deprived him of his sweetheart Eduarda Gutierrez, and banished him to prison and early death. Love in this novel is situated at the periphery; what matters more is the imaginative re-creation of the very real rift existing in society at the time. On one hand are the rich and the powerful — the businessmen, the government officials, the landed gentry; on the other hand are the poor — the calesa drivers, the jobless, the imprisoned. With deft precision and purposeful use of language, the novelist succeeds in approximating that reality: Manila at the turn of the century peopled by recognizable characters experiencing the myriad aspects of day to day existence. Pulsating with life, the novel takes us from the frenetic activities of the workers in the opening scene through the succession of misfortunes that befall Luis and Eduarda to the intricate political and economic maneuvers of the powerful, to the last scenes of the imprisoned Luis and the promise of impending disaster. The novel ends with the dying Luis' vision of the crucified Christ in the firmament as a great fire rages, threatening to destroy the whole city of Manila:

Tingnan mo. Sunog sa Maynila, sunog na malakas at sa anyo'y tila tumutupok sa sanlibutan. Ganyan ang buhawing aking pinapangarap, ang araw ng singilang aking ninanais sa ipagkakapantaypantay ng madla at iguguho ng masamang palakad ng bagong kapisanan. Mistulang larawan ang sunog na iyon ng pagtutuos sa darating na bukas, iyang bagong araw na minimithing masilayan ng mga api't nagtitiis, ng mga dinuduhagi at inaalipin.²⁵

Look. Fire engulfs Manila, a raging fire which seems to devour the whole world. This is the tornado that has obsessed me in my dreams, the day of reckoning I envision to bring about the equality of all men and the destruction of the evil ways of society. That fire is a vivid reflection of the forthcoming struggle, that new day which the oppressed, the suffering, the enslaved, and the exploited desire to see.

The novel ends as other novels do, with a note of hope, of

25. Faustino Aguilar, *Pinaglahuan* (Manila: Manila Filatelica, 1907), p. 411.

affirmation. But change will come only after the people have learned to take decisive steps to improve their condition. This much is gleaned not only from this work but from the other socially committed novels of the period.

This period in the history of the Tagalog novel when the writers deliberately preoccupied themselves with serious subject matter, when the novelists never lost consciousness of themselves as moral guides, when the craftsman in them was revealed in the use of technique to clarify, not obscure, the meaning of the novel, has yet to be duplicated. This is not to say that the works produced then all showed mastery of both content and form. As shown earlier, the novels dealing with love tended to repeat themselves a great deal in terms of situation and characters, and even in conventional rhetorical phrases. Other novels suffer not only from lack of understanding of some aspects of life but are moreover flawed by the absence of anything that can be remotely called craft. The stories are often a mere stringing together of highly implausible events marked by coincidences, and discoveries experienced by people who are types rather than rounded characters. But comparatively speaking, it must be pointed out, the first years appear more significant. For many of the writers not only availed themselves of influences from the traditions crystallized in the earlier works, but also sought to endow their works with a sense of contemporaneity. One gets the impression that what they depict is life lived; not a dead transcript of some improbable and irrelevant situation.

It is precisely those novels, therefore, which have succeeded in re-creating the significant experiences of the people, with the theme of love interwoven into their fabric, that can be considered significant. The deeper the participation is with the life of the people, and the closer the novel is to the texture of daily experience, the wider is the novel's dimension as a work of art. In the long run, it is the kind of subject matter depicted in literature that determines the novel's place in tradition. It is the writer's meaningful response to the flux of experience which is ultimately translated into his work and by which he will be judged.

A brief reading of Regalado's "Kasaysayan ng Nobelang Tagalog," where the term "Golden Age" first appeared, and which later critics used as part of their critical vocabulary, will reveal how as early as 1938, in the process of formulating some critical standards Regalado had already reached the same conclusion. With unerring accuracy and acute perception into the nature of those early novels, he concluded that the early novelists in their own way managed to create a body of literature of great significance. Using what he gleaned from the works of his contemporaries and not from any body of critical ideas, he judged these works and explained why some were better than others. Perhaps one may quarrel with Regalado for his rather extravagant use of terms or for his arbitrary termination of the "Golden Age" in 1921 or for his failure to give younger writers (those writing in the thirties) their due. But one has to acknowledge his critical stand as one position that paves the way for future criticism of the novel.

The term "Golden Age," at least as authors of survey textbooks like Jose Villa Panganiban, Eufonio Alip, Rufino Alejandro, and Teofilo del Castillo describe it, seems to refer to the phenomenal growth of the novel. Therefore, the basis seems to have been quantity. In this sense, the title is rather presumptuous. Other countries can lay claim to the "Golden Age" only after many years of experimentation and only after consistently superior works have been produced. Greece had its Golden Age in the time of the great tragedians and comedians; England had hers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with such literary giants as Shakespeare, Milton, and Spencer. It is unfortunate, therefore, that the term has been used and accepted by subsequent writers to mean mere number.

However, one can excuse this use of term only if the novels are to be viewed within the critical perspective through which Regalado was looking at them in 1938. In the preceding discussion of some of the critical beliefs prevalent during those years, it has been pointed out that one basic tenet emphasizes the concept of literature as mirror of life through which the readers can gain insight into their own lives. As long as the novels

adhere to this basic tenet, then their function as teacher is fulfilled. Many novels written at that time sought to embody what Regalado would consider as serious matter worthy of the readers' careful attention. In other words, a novel's significance is to be judged in terms of the novelist's choice of subject matter, his awareness of his role as teacher, and the degree to which his audience can identify with the experience depicted in the work. The novelist illumines his reader if he succeeds in evoking an emotional and intellectual response that can be translated into practical action.

Consequently, it is only when this idea is firmly implanted in the mind that the term "Golden Age" can really mean anything at all. Quantity does not justify the use of such a term. One has to debunk the myth, so long uncritically accepted as "fact," that perpetuates the belief that number means achievement.

Furthermore, one has to disagree with the choice of 1921 as the crucial year that signalled the decline of the novel; this retrogression apparently covers all the years after 1921. As pointed out in an earlier section, some novels of the first two decades already showed some of the worst aspects of romanticism: cloying sentimentality, trite, if not dead, rhetoric, predictable and unimaginative plot, characters that border on caricatures. These same negative traits not only managed to surface in the later decades; they even succeeded in dominating the scene. But despite a constant barrage of such novels the realistic tradition managed to come into its own, as evidenced in some novels which can compare with, if not actually surpass, the quality of the earlier works considered significant. Thus it is not fair to generalize that the novel after 1921 declined in quality.

THE NOVEL: 1922-1944

For a better understanding of the novel during the twenties and the thirties a re-creation of the social and cultural scene is in order, if only to focus our attention on several factors that could have been responsible for making the romantic temper the dominant tendency.

Two decades of American rule that created an atmosphere fraught with blatant anti-Americanism gave way to a more peaceful and resigned air in the 1920's. A marked change had come about in the writers' milieu, a social transformation, so to speak. The theme of patriotism that preoccupied the leading writers of the first years of the American rule as a response to historical conditions, was no longer fashionable. Novels highly critical of the government and "seditious" in nature as they urged for stronger action against the colonizers, were no longer written. The burning issues — class struggle, agitation for independence, the debilitating influence of foreign capitalists — had simmered down and the patriotic fever had been spent. The realistic temper so evident in the earlier novels, in the careful scrutiny of particularized time and place as the backdrop for contemporary events, had been supplanted by another kind of writing. What happened, in perspective, was a reinforcing of the Balagtas tradition — romantic, overly sentimental plot, characters, and atmosphere; and of course, that all-embracing theme of love.

But whereas the love theme as embodied by such writers as Regalado, Hernandez Peña, Roman Reyes and other novelists really explored certain aspects of life with genuine understanding, the bulk of the later novels using the same theme suffered from an overdose of sentimentality and escapism. The difference between the early novels and the later ones lies in the kind of emphasis and the manner used in treating the same theme. Peña's *Nena at Neneng* and Regalado's *May Pagsinta'y Walang Puso* both dealt with the nature of love. The first novel, in the tradition of the nineteenth-century guidebook, dissected the ills that would befall people who deliberately violated the order of things. Love was carefully integrated with a totality of vision that encompassed all of society at that time. Regalado's novel, on the other hand, is a perceptive study of a woman betrayed by her lover. Instead of sentimentalizing her by making her wallow in self-pity, the novelist deliberately refrains from falling into that trap by making her interact with the various characters in the story. Seeing her anguish objectified and dramatized, the

reader can then gauge for himself the extent of her shame as she desperately tries to rectify her mistake.

In the better and earlier novels written in the romantic tradition, emphasis is laid not solely on the plot but on the characters being delineated. In the later novels, characterized by mushiness and gross distortion of sentiments, the plot becomes the focal point in so far as it presents the predicament of the lovers, the steps taken to surmount the difficulties, and the ending, either tragic or happy. If problems are not overcome, the last scene is set against the background of a cemetery complete with a description of nature sharing the lover's grief.

The seeds of the romantic strain were already there even during the second decade, in the novels of such writers as Simplicio Flores and Juan Rivera Lazaro. Certain historical factors were to play a crucial role in abetting this tendency further. The trend away from the literature of protest became much stronger in the 1920's. Historical events, becoming less urgent because of distance, were no longer suitable subject matter for the younger novelists. Instead, many of them chose to write stories indiscriminately received for their escapist quality.

Several factors conspired to make what is sentimental the temper in the later decades. Discursiveness, which characterized the novels of ideas like *Banaag at Sikat* and even *Pinaglahuan*, had to go if the novel were to compete with a shorter form of entertainment, the short story. This newly introduced form, actually a miniature version of the novel, could never explore the more complex areas of experience that a novel could. As a source of entertainment, however, it was fast winning an entertainment-hungry audience. The age of the serialized novel which ran into several hundreds of pages was irretrievably gone. Novels now seldom exceeded a hundred pages. The drastic limitation took its toll on the subject matter; since emphasis had to be laid on what happened to a few characters, little room was left for attempts at understanding fully the characters themselves.

One other medium of entertainment was the movie, Hollywood-made or locally produced. Here was a new and fascinating world, another accessible way of fantasizing. The

interaction between the movie and the novel was such that the latter very frequently copied plots and characters from the films, especially Hollywood films. However, especially in the 1930's with the advent of the "talkies," the novel drew attention to itself. A sure-fire guarantee for box-office success was to make movies based on the novels being serialized. Some enormously popular novelists like Fausto Galauran, Nemesio Caravana and other commercial writers were even asked by the producers to churn out stories tailor-made for particular actors and actresses. The novels acted as showcases to display the talent of a Rogelio de la Rosa, a Rosa del Rosario, a Jose Padilla and a Carmen Rosales. The writers felt free to violate the integrity of the novel as they changed scenes, events, and characters at will to satisfy the producers.

Besides these extrinsic factors, there were other reasons to account for the sorry state of the Tagalog novel. By the 1920's the ranks of the older writers had thinned out considerably. It is true that several of them were still writing, like Iñigo Ed. Regalado, Engracio Valmonte, Faustino Aguilar and Ruperto Cristobal. But for the most part their places had been taken by a younger batch of writers, many of whom were still too young to comprehend the impact of certain historical events. For Regalado and company, the emergence of these fledgling writers spelled the death of the novel as they viewed it.

One must bear in mind that for the older writers, the novelist's role was that of a teacher, a moral guide. There was a very strong insistence on the moral dimension of any work of art. But to all appearances, the younger breed of writers had lost consciousness of their premier role as teachers; they were quite content with weaving stories rather mechanically, based on some personal conflict and domestic strife that had no bearing on the life of a great number of people. They were young; many started to write when they were hardly out of their teens. Victor Toledo Marcos and Fausto Galauran had their first novels accepted for publication when they were eighteen years old. They wrote without any formal training in writing; their manner of telling a story

was purely intuitive or highly imitative of the shorter novels of the preceding decades.

Besides the loosening of grip on socially-oriented ideas, the younger writers showed little evidence of craftsmanship. Given a certain situation and a set of characters, they created a novel out of the sheer instinct for story-telling, in a language that did not approximate the richness and beauty of Tagalog as it was used in the earlier novels. In an attempt to prove that Tagalog could contain indigenous experience as well as any foreign language could, the older novelists really tried to exhaust all the possibilities of Tagalog. What was commonly mistaken for the flowery and ornate was really the end product of a laborious process of articulating the native experience in all its nuances and ramifications. And again, one must recall that for such writers, literature was intimately related with rhetoric.

It would be simplistic to state that the older writers were superb craftsmen. But the point is, given certain materials, these novelists used all technical resources to re-create the experience in a manner they saw fit. The younger writers, on the other hand, failed to see beyond the plot. They stopped short after the introduction of characters faced with certain situations. After all, there was a ready audience for their work; its acceptance was predictable.

Much, therefore, depended on the kind of audience patronizing the novels. To a great extent, the audience's response to the novels determined the course of this genre. For the most part, readers of vernacular novels have always been extremely naive, uncritical, conservative and traditional. At the turn of the century, the novel had for its readers people belonging to all classes of society. Tagalog lorded it over Spanish and English, the new language. After several years, however, English became the dominant language. Tagalog was once more relegated to the background as the poor cousin, as the language of the masses. But this was precisely the segment of society that patronized the novel.

Increasing commercialization of the novel had made possible a wider audience. In 1922, *Liwayway* was founded and started

to serialize novels to boost its circulation. The Tagalog newspapers that had served as one outlet for the novels earlier had gone out of circulation. Realizing that they could run out of novels to serialize, the editors of the magazine decided to launch a contest open only to new writers. Several unknown writers were discovered, among them Fausto Galauran, Gervasio Santiago and Lazaro Francisco. These men had no formal training in writing. They wrote because it was a lucrative job. Gregorio V. Coching, a printer who won first prize for his *Sanggumay*, became the model for aspiring writers. *Liwayway's* winning slogan could probably serve as index to the mentality of both the writer and the audience: "Liwayway, ang lingguhang kagiliw-giliw, nakapagtuturo at nakapagaaliw." ("Liwayway, the enjoyable weekly, that teaches and gives pleasure.") Pamper the readers by pandering to their emotions; inject some seriousness into essentially light, trivial stories with a little bit of moralizing here and there — this seemed to be the order of the day.

Given such an audience — simple, unpretentious, uncritical — and writers whose only claim to the title was the ability to re-use traditional materials with new trappings, and magazines whose only purpose was to make money, what could one expect but a steady output of sentimental love stories, stock situations, a long line of stereotyped characters, an atmosphere that was hopelessly melancholic? Indeed, what could one expect from these works where problems that defied solution in real life were solved neatly? The novelist endowed with a realistic vision will refuse to provide a pat solution, a ready-made answer to life's problems as explored in the novel. It will go against his grain to force the conclusion. Yet this arbitrary way of ending the novel was the method resorted to even by such intelligent novelists as Lazaro Francisco and Amado V. Hernandez. Villains must be punished with impunity; long-suffering heroes and heroines must get their rewards either here on earth or in heaven. One favorite subject — the conflict arising from essential differences between the rich and the poor — always turns out to be a simple case of the poor being assimilated into the snobbish upper class.

An enumeration of some of the favorite topics in the novels will give the reader an idea of the temper of the times. Love in its many guises became the dominant theme in most of the novels. Fausto Galauran's *Ang Monghita* (1933) (which later became a box-office hit when filmed), dealt with the love of two sisters for one man, a love which led the younger, in a supreme act of self-sacrifice or stupidity, to enter the convent. Another novel that met with popular acclaim, *Igorota sa Baguio* (1935), a pseudo-historical account of the origins of Baguio, revolved around the love between a Spanish mestizo (predictably handsome, cultured) and an Igorota maiden. Their love was so great that it overcame all obstacles of culture, custom, and class distinction. One phenomenally successful novel, Lazaro Francisco's *Sa Paanan ng Krus* (1934) was allegedly written in order to serve warning to the author's second wife that she had better be a good mother to his children by his first wife. Here one perceives the stock situation of three orphans being maltreated by their father's second wife. Rosalia Aguinaldo, one of the ten women novelists, wrote popular novels dealing with such topics as woman betrayed, in *Higanti ng Pag-ibig* (1934), love made to choose between son and husband as in *Pag-ibig ng Isang Ina* (1935), and a woman who married a rake but who eventually found happiness in another man as in *Ang Babaeng Mahiwaga* (1934). Teofilo Saucó chronicled the adventures of a handsome and rich scoundrel as he left in his trail a number of women he seduced. Naturally, he had to be punished in the novel *Ang Makiring Maynila* (1935). Antonio Sempio's *Anak Dalita* (1933) is a sentimental account of a poor girl's marrying a rich man, her death, and her son's eventual reconciliation with his estranged father after twenty years.

Such was the material constantly being fed to the readers by novelists like Adriano Laudico, Gregorio Coching, Susana de Guzman, Hilaria Labog, Nemesio Caravana, and other writers. And such was the material uncritically accepted by the reading audience.

In most of the novels, emphasis is laid on the plot more than on anything else. The movement is horizontal and seldom

vertical. The novels contain such elements as mistaken identity, letters and diaries to further the action, coincidences, and virtually anything that the novelist could lay his hands on to force the ending. No wonder then that the point of view is almost always either the omniscient or the first-person point of view, the events are arranged chronologically, and the characters are idealized types. One looks for any semblance of thematic unity; one seldom finds any strand that would tighten up the whole structure.

The reader, trained after many years to look for the narrative rather than character or theme, had to be catered to. Whatever attempts were made to paint life in terms of grey were eventually offset by an outcome articulated in terms of black and white. Resolution was always final and complete; loose strands were conveniently ignored. The ending always contained the moral of the story, a tendency which showed that the writers were never really able to wrench themselves free from the tradition of didacticism. With the plot the thing, one could not therefore expect any vertical movement in terms of character delineation, or attempts to objectify the experience through a meaningful use of language.

Antonio Sempio's *Naglahong Bituin* (1937) exemplifies the prevalent motifs and characters. It is a typical love triangle: the beautiful but poor Florida is courted by Aristeo, the handsome but poor and struggling law student, and Pepe Palanca, the rich businessman. Florida and Aristeo fall in love, but Aling Itang, her scheming mother, persuades the weak-willed girl to become the mistress of the rich suitor. Out of frustration, Aristeo strives harder in his studies. He becomes a successful lawyer. Florida, on the other hand (for such is the wheel of fortune) is abandoned by Pepe. She gets sick and finds out that she is pregnant. By a remarkable coincidence, Aling Itang, desperate for money, runs into Aristeo, now a rich man. He helps the girl, but Florida insists that she will pay him back the money he has lent her. By dint of hard work, mother and daughter prosper. Aristeo finds himself in a dilemma: should he marry her and face society's censure or should he just leave her alone? An

easy way out is discovered when Palanca approaches him for help. The lawyer promises to help the businessman only if the latter will marry Florida. But the girl flatly refuses the offer of marriage. Without any explanation, Aristeo marries another girl; Florida pines and dies. The story ends with Aristeo laying a wreath on Florida's tomb.

Note the exaggerated sentimentalism in the choice of words and imagery in the opening lines of the novel:

Ah! tunay nga! Ang pag-ibig ay isang masanghayang bulaklak na balot ng mahahayap na tinik; samyuin mo't anong pagkabango! hawakan mo't masusugatan ka, oh! anong pagkahapdi ng mga tinik na titimo at magpadugo sa iyong mga daliri. Sapagkat samantalang iyong hawak ang bulaklak at nangangarap ka ng ligaya, hindi ka pa man napasawa'y kumikirot na ang iyong dibdib; sapagkat samantalang maiinit pa ang matitimyas na halik na iyong idinadampi sa kanyang mga sariwang talulot ay nagduruguan na ang sugat sa iyong puso . . .

Ngunit . . . ano ang gagawin? Magtiis, magtiis. Ang pag-ibig ang siyang puno ng ligaya at ang kaligayahang bulaklak lamang ng paghati. Pagkaraan mong namnamin ang matamis na bunga, bakit mo iluluha ang pait ng kanyang buto? Pagkaraan mong umasa at manalig sa katapatan ng isang pusong magdaraya, bakit mo iluluha ang pagkabigo ng matibay na panalig? ²⁶

Ah! Indeed it is true! Love is a fragrant flower covered by prickly thorns; smell it; what fragrance! touch it and it pricks you, oh! how painful are the thorns that cut and bloody the fingers. While you hold the flower and dream of happiness, you are not content yet and already the heart is pained; while the warmth of the fervent kisses that you have planted on its fresh petals lingers, blood streams from the wounds inflicted on your heart . . .

But . . . what must one do? Endure, endure. Love is the fountainhead of joy and happiness only the flower of sorrow. After you have tasted the sweet fruit, why should you grieve over its bitter seed? After you have pinned your hope on and placed your trust in a treacherous heart, why lament the betrayal of your abiding trust?

Several questions arise: Whatever happened to the other tradition? Was it consigned unjustly to oblivion? Were there writers who contributed anything to the body of the literature of protest so vitally alive during the first two decades? Given a set of techniques that had proven old-fashioned and fossilized, did the writers make any attempt to look for other ways of

26. Antonio Sempio, *Naglahong Bituin* (Manila: Bahay Limbagan ni P. Sayo, 1937), p. I.

embodying native experience? If so, what innovations were made?

One salient feature of most of the so-called romantic novels is the simplistic way in which the novelists in general tend to look at the class struggle. Even when the plot deals with a member of the upper class falling in love with a poor nobody, the novel does not succeed in creating a distinct impression that the story is really situated in real life with recognizable people and events. Characters appear to exist in a vacuum. Classes are mentioned only to heighten the sense of outrage that the reader feels; yet sometimes it deteriorates into pure sentimental pity. In cases where the milieu is strictly upper-class, one detects a shying away from a deeper treatment of mores and life style. The reader merely becomes a recipient of the usual unimaginative and superficial description of endless rounds of parties, picnics, and other frivolous activities engaged in by the rich. Similarly, the novels that depict the life of the poor, whether situated in the slums of Tondo or some far-flung God-forsaken barrio, never really go beyond an almost standard description of the people's miserable lives. In both kinds of novels, fidelity to individuating traits is almost non-existent. Consequently, falsification of experience occurs in the stereotyped, simplistic, and superficial treatment of a very real problem in society: the glaring discrepancy between what is in terms of social and economic equality, and what should be.

Not all the novels are that deeply mired in false sentiments and unforgivable display of exaggerated pathos. Certain works, though not totally realistic, nevertheless reveal some tendencies which make them heirs to the tradition of Rizal's novels. One is *Lihim ng Isang Pulo* (1926), a novel by Faustino Aguilar. Its significance is two-fold: this is one of the earliest attempts to re-create the experience of the people before the coming of the Spaniards; and this is the only novel, at least in the twenties, that purged Spanish words from Tagalog. The kind of life depicted here — the conflict between the serfs as personified in Hinahon and the noblemen in the person of Lakan Kislap — was life that our forefathers could have actually experienced. The

novel can be viewed as one work that yields a complexity of meaning. Perhaps it is because Aguilar is imbued with a deep understanding of his people, coupled with a sincere desire to jolt the readers into a realization that the problems confronted by the early Filipinos were precisely the same ones that could lead to bloodshed in the 1920's — agrarian problems. The novel is indeed a far cry from the usual type being published those days. Realism is manifested in the vivid re-creation of fifteenth-century life, in fully delineated characters like the lovers Hinahon and Luningning, in the intelligent choice of situations that objectify and transmit the novelist's own personal vision of life to the reader, who then gains some insight into an aspect of experience that has become part of history.

That burning issue — the tenancy problem — that prompted Aguilar to use past experience for the illumination of the present was also the topic chosen by another Tagalog novelist. In 1930 Lazaro Francisco published *Ama*, a novel that depicts the evil of a system that exploits the poor. The central character, Mang Tasyo, comes out Job-like in his patience and endurance, despite the acts of injustice committed against him by the rich and powerful landlord. What takes the novel several notches higher than other works which presumably wished to depict the same problem is Francisco's genuine understanding of his people. Through the denouement, he shows that the solution to the agrarian problem lies not in violence but in the threshing out of difficulties between landlord and tenant with the aid of the government.

In 1936 Servando de los Angeles published *Ang Huling Timawa* with this purpose in mind:

... hindi upang maging babasahing libangan lamang kundi makatulong kahit bahagya sa mga kalahi, sa pagsulong sa panahong kasalukuyan at hinaharap, kaya ko isinulat ang aklat na ito.²⁷

... not only to provide pleasurable reading, but to help even a little to bring about progress in the present and in the future, that is why I wrote this work.

27. Servando de los Angeles, *Ang Huling Timawa* (Manila: n.p., 1936), p. 1.

On the surface, the novel appears concerned merely with a political war between the poor governor and his arch political enemy, Braulio de los Santos. A motif of young love unrequited because of the rivalry between two families is interwoven into the social matrix of the novel. But the novel is definitely more than just an exposé of a corrupt political system, more than a love story. It is one of the few imaginative works that try to make an in-depth study of the values and systems at work in Philippine life. No mere concatenation of loosely strung events, the novel proves to be an incisive study of the forces of greed, on the one hand, and justice and social reform, on the other. The corrupt politicians — De los Santos, Don Procopio — are exposed relentlessly; the other party — the oppressed, the downtrodden and the idealistic men espousing their cause — are presented with accuracy that refuses to verge on the apotheosis of the poor. Mateo, the old and wise man to whom the poor run for advice says:

Wala tayong dapat sikapin sa mga araw na ito kundi maglapit-lapit, upang kung buo tayo sa damdamin at pananalig, ay makakilos na tulad sa isang tao, sa pagtatanggol sa matuwid . . .

We should attend to nothing these days except to stay close together, so in our unity of sentiment and belief we can move as one man, for the protection of what is right.

The last three novels discussed, despite their claim to significance by virtue of a clear and more comprehensive vision of life, still hewed closely to the techniques and conventions used in the first years of the novel. This goes to prove that for most writers, what matters is *what to tell*, and not *how to tell*. Technique is not “discovery” as Mark Schorer contends; technique falls into place only after the material has been chosen. This belief informs whatever criticism has come down to the present generation.

However, realizing that old-fashioned techniques would not augur well for the development of native literature, several writers around 1935 took it upon themselves to open Tagalog literature to Western influence, if literature was not to stagnate.

This move only served to widen the rift between the old pillars and their disciples (Regalado, Santos and Julian B. Cruz) and the "rebels" headed by such writers as Teodoro A. Agoncillo, Alejandro Abadilla, Brigido Batungbakal, Clodualdo del Mundo and other younger writers. Everything came to a head when the iconoclastic writers who called themselves the Panitikan group burned the novels and poems of such stalwarts as Regalado and Santos in a dramatic gesture of defiance. It was not so much the subject matter that the younger writers were objecting to as the "sentimental" and predictable treatment of plot, the ornate and flowery use of language, the frequency of the appearance of brooding and languishing lovers, and the general air of melancholy that pervaded the works.

It is important to note that by the 1930's, there were quite a number of Filipino writers who had read works written in English or translated into English. Filipino writers in English like Arturo B. Rotor, Manuel Arguilla, and others were already writing in a manner that showed how well they had imbibed certain Western literary techniques. Some writers who had used to write in English, like N. V. M. Gonzales, Narciso Reyes, Agustin Fabian, Hernando Ocampo, and Macario Pineda, shifted to Tagalog during the years of World War II. At this time *Liwayway* published many short stories executed with a great deal of technical skill — skill no doubt learned from the stories of Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway, and William Faulkner. In the stories, the writers managed to render, not tell. Such technical devices as point of view, use of suggestive rather than explicit details, restraint in the use of language, ironic tone, dramatic presentation of events and characters, foreshadowing, symbolism, and other aspects of technique were utilized at will by Filipino writers to embody experience which for the most part (considering the crucial events of the time) seemed innocuous. Writers had no alternative but to publish stories celebrating life in the barrio, and depicting the idyllic aspects of existences far removed from the sordidness and ugliness of war, because *Liwayway* was under the strict supervision of the Japanese-controlled *Simbunsiya*.

THE NOVEL: 1944—1975

There was no outlet for the novel during the war years. But after the war, several magazines like *Daigdig*, *Ilang-Ilang*, *Bulaklak*, and *Aliwan* were founded. Writers who had written only short stories turned their attention to the novel, which seemed as popular as ever. It was at this period that there arose novelists who had been brought up on a steady diet of Western writers. Techniques used effectively in the Western short story were resorted to in an attempt to inject something new into the novel. These writers were few in number when compared to those who had started their careers in the 1920's and were still very much a part of the scene. Some of the older writers like Jose Esperanza Cruz, Adriano Laudico, and Nemesio Caravana, even managed to become editors or editorial staff members, who ultimately had the last word on published material. What could one expect, therefore, but the same kinds of novels that were popular in the decades before the war? It was at this time that the phenomenon of "dugtungan" came about: a novel would be the combined effort of two writers who alternated with each other in every weekly issue of the magazine where the novel was being serialized.

The few novelists steeped in Western tradition did manage to have their works published. A close study of these novels will reveal that although the romantic sensibility still informs the novel, certain salient features betray realistic tendencies. The themes used were still drawn from tradition. But although love is depicted, forming the backdrop is the theme of social consciousness.

Macario Pineda's *Ginto Sa Makiling* (1947) and *Halina sa Ating Bukas* (1946) show how the romantic sensibility is tempered by realistic touches. The first novel is an idealized love story that makes use of the beautiful legend of Mariang Makiling. It manages to keep its feet on the ground by a sustained attempt to awaken the readers to the country's pressing need to produce men of character whose actions and beliefs can compare favorably with those of the heroes now living in Mount Makiling, a Shangrila-like kind of existence where people are forever young.

In this haven, streets are littered with gold, the objectification of our heroes' paramount importance. It is in this place that the sensitively portrayed lovers, the faithful Edong and Sanang, will eventually be reconciled after seventy years. The second novel features the traditional poor boy-rich girl relationship. The novelist, however seems preoccupied with matter weightier than the love problem at hand. Through dramatized scenes and well-defined characters, he articulates the need to develop the country, to cultivate its immense natural resources, to do away with self-indulgence and indolence.

Agustin Fabian's *Timawa* (1951) is a radical break from the usual complicated plots and labyrinthine structures of many novels. The novel deals with Andres, a Filipino student in the United States who takes all sorts of jobs — as a dishwasher, a boxer, even a pimp — to earn those precious dollars. He undergoes all this so that he can have enough money to build a hospital in his barrio, where the only real thing is the grinding poverty. Leaving his barrio as a *timawa*, he returns a successful surgeon with the rank of major in the United States Army. The novel's merit lies in the deft characterization, especially of Andres, who surprises the reader with the ability to look at himself with detachment and to laugh ironically at his own defects. He is a rake and a scoundrel to his compatriots abroad, but he shrugs this accusation off by insisting that he is just being true to himself. *Maria Mercedes* (1953) by A. C. Fabian is a rebellion against the hackneyed love plot. In obvious defiance of society's mores and conventions, two couples exchange spouses. The husband of Maria Mercedes has been caught in the act with the Daniel's wife. The two aggrieved members agree to live together as man and wife, but only in name. It is only after fifteen long years that they confess that they have been in love with each other. By this time the other couple have already died.

Two novelists of the 1950's — Andres Cristobal Cruz and Liwayway Arceo — show two opposite tendencies of the time. Cruz's *Sa Tundo Man May Langit Din* (1958) is a highly realistic portrayal of life in Tondo in a language that seeks to approximate the language of the people. Gone is the flowery diction that

characterized the early works; in its place are racy, elliptical constructions, colloquial and colorful expressions. The pervading theme is the complex of factors that make Tondo what it is — forever defying simplified definitions because it encompasses myriad experiences. The atmosphere is distinctly that of lower-class people described as they go on toiling, earning out a living in this “langit.” Whereas in this novel the tone is faintly ironic, the tone in Liwayway Arceo’s *Lisa* is always gentle and compassionate. Arceo’s forte seems to be a delineation of characters drawn from a middle-class milieu, a rather limited and tight social structure. She is able to probe deeply into her characters’ motives and actions, and herein lies her significance. She lacks, however, the analytical mind that Cruz possesses, which enables him to explore motives in relation to external factors that perpetually threaten the individual in a society that is seldom compassionate.

Needless to say, Cruz seems to hew closer to the Rizal tradition, while Arceo and her very feminine sensibility shows affinities with the romantic temper.

In 1958, the self-styled rebel in Tagalog poetry, Alejandro G. Abadilla, wrote *Pagkamulat ni Magdalena* in collaboration with Elpidio Kapulong. It was conceived as the work that would prove that the Tagalog novel had really come of age. Set against Manila in the 1980’s, when the country has been overrun by Chinese communists, it unfolds the story of Magdalena, a secret agent forced to turn traitor to the land that fed her, when she falls in love with the leader of the revolution, the U.P. professor Dario Lazaro. A motley group of characters make up the rest of the novel: Veronica, woman rebel hungry for love; Professor Johnson, the emissary from the United States who promised help; Miss Reyes, the woman spurned by Dario who later caused his death. Somehow, the novel fails to weave the strands into a unified whole. The much-touted sex scenes embarrass the reader because of their awkward handling. Discussions of the different aspects of life — country, church, individual, politics — obscure rather than clarify the central thesis. The vision permeating the novel, to say the least, is blurred; the ending,

definitely meant to be allegorical — the woman Magdalena being promised future happiness by the Son of Man — falls flat. In perspective, one would find it difficult to place the novel under any tradition.

More than any of the novelists discussed in this section as those who show the realistic temper, it is Lazaro Francisco and Amado V. Hernandez who have really contributed to the vitality of the radical tradition. The fictional world earlier created in *Ama* (1930) again becomes the battleground for conflicts in Francisco's later novels *Maganda pa ang Daigdig* (1958) and its sequel *Daluyong* (1962). In both novels, the stories revolve around Lino, a war veteran thoroughly disillusioned with the kind of society one encounters in the city. But the province offers no respite to the weary man and his son. Here, there are still men who prey on their fellow men: the landlords on their tenants. The different institutions — State, Church, School — conspire with one another to exploit the poor. The novelist seems to be saying that for social change to take place, there must be moral transformation on the part of the people.

Amado V. Hernandez, at worst, is an uneven novelist. But his two novels are a vivid depiction of the conditions of the country in the 1960's. *Luha ng Buwaya* (1963) deals with the plight of tenants and squatters in the mythical barrio of Sampilong and how the exploited farmers and the idealist segment of society band together to destroy the forces headed by the landlord. Interwoven into the social theme is the love story revolving around Bandong and Pina, but the love angle is never allowed to intrude into the smooth progression of the other theme. Instead of dwelling on agrarian problems, *Mga Ibong Mandaragit* (1959) chose to reflect the social, political, and economic conditions in Manila. The novel follows Mando Plaridel, a former soldier, as he mercilessly attempts to destroy those forces that have for a long time stood in the way of progress.

The beginnings of the 1960's saw the emergence of a new breed of writers, all young and university-educated and therefore exposed to the most significant works of Western literature. Their writings prove that although they have availed themselves

of literary influences gleaned from such disparate writers as James Joyce, Ignazio Silone, Dostoyevsky, Faulkner, Gogol, John Steinbeck (as they themselves admit), these young writers are still very much aware of the Rizal tradition. Underlying their works is an interest in the experiences of the broad masses of the people, and they are able to reflect a particular vision of life in their novels. But unlike Hernandez and Francisco, who wrote in the tradition (in terms of both theme and technique), such writers as Rogelio Sikat, Edgardo M. Reyes, Eduardo B. Reyes, Rosario de Guzman Lingat, and several others, consciously tried to liberate their writings from the trappings of the older novels — too blatant didacticism, overwhelming sentimentality, stereotyped characters, unimaginatively structured plots and discursiveness. In the works of these younger writers, the reader discerns a fusion of theme and form, a great deal of imagination in the use of such devices as flashbacks, foreshadowing, and point of view, subtle delineation of characters, and remarkable restraint in handling situations and events.

Rogelio Sikat's *Dugo sa Bukangliwayway* (1964) exemplifies the tendency of the writers of the 1960's. Clearly, the influence at work here is the Rizal tradition. The preoccupation is with the life of the hero who is exploited in the beginning but emerges triumphant in the sense that he is able to amass wealth. The hero's exile from the barrio and his eventual return parallel those of Simoun in *El Filibusterismo*. To make the similarity more obvious, Sikat names his character Simon. As a rich man, Simon tries to improve the condition of his town by building an agricultural school. Power-hungry landlords try to block his efforts at making his people more aware of the need for drastic change. The novel ends with the death of Simon as he prepares to address the townsfolk to rally them to vote for the poor but honest schoolteacher, Andong. His death merely heightens the urgency of the situation that threatens to break into violence.

It is Edgardo M. Reyes' *Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (1968), more than any other of the modern Tagalog novels, which shows how steeped the novel is in the traditions of both Rizal and Balagtas. Consciously or unconsciously, Reyes seems to

have opened himself up to the different facets of these two traditions as he grapples with a very contemporary problem: that of survival in an oppressive and ruthless system. In his novel, the writer depicts the glaring polarities of our society: the poor and the rich, the deceptively simple life in the barrio and the life in the asphalt jungle, the illusion provincianos have of city life and the consequent disillusionment, human love or what is left of it and the bruising impersonality of the city, exploitation and liberation through death. These themes are not treated in the abstract. Rather, the novelist focuses closely on those disparate aspects of lived and felt life that the hero Julio Madiaga immerses himself in as he searches for his sweetheart Ligaya. The quest finally takes him to Chinatown where he finds Ligaya, who has become the mistress of a Chinese businessman. The latter discovers Ligaya's plan to leave him, and murders her. The novel ends poignantly as the bloodthirsty crowd, all Filipinos at that, prepare to kill Julio, who has reached a dead end. The search for Ligaya (his source of happiness and only reason for living) has ironically turned out to be the search for his own and apparently inevitable death.

The whole novel is an account of a search interwoven with deep insights into the predicament of the workers and slum dwellers that flock to Manila. But here is no dry and dull sociological documentation of sordidness and abject misery. Throughout the novel, such ugliness is imaginatively juxtaposed with the promise of what could be. The novel's ending, however, seems to dramatize rather categorically the utter impossibility of such a life in this place where man's humanity is systematically crushed by insidious and destructive forces.

In the novel, the depiction of the theme of love is never made to spill over into pure sentiment. What prevents this is not only Edgardo M. Reyes' firm grasp of his technique, but his acute understanding as well of the lives of his characters. His depiction of the lot of the construction workers and the life of people in Tondo transcends the pat and predictable descriptions of many novels. Knowledge and genuine compassion inform *Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag*.

In such novels and in other works like Efren Abueg's *Dilim sa Umaga* (1968), a novel of the initiation of a United States-trained Filipino student into a ruthlessly de-humanizing system; Rosario de Guzman Lingat's *Kung Wala na ang Tag-araw* (1969), a hauntingly beautiful and incisive study of the workings of the mind of a man bent on discovering permanence in human relationships; and her *Ano Ngayon, Ricky?*, a novel vividly recreating the smouldering violence of the 1970's; and in several other novels by the younger writers, the reader discerns the continuity of the major traditions at work in Tagalog literature. Somehow, despite the constant barrage of romantic novels, the realistic tendency manages to surface, to assert itself as the crucial factor in the shaping of other works.

With these works of the last few years, the novel has apparently come full circle. What started out as a genre in the 1900's that exhibited both romantic and realistic tendencies and which later, in a romantic decline, deteriorated during the succeeding decades, mainly because experience had been falsified, has managed to recapture the original vision. The creative urge that impelled the older novelists to use a Western genre to mirror the conditions of the times is probably the same urge that has prompted the more significant novelists writing in the 1960's and early 1970's to create works that reveal the writer's commitment to his goal: to serve as reflector of contemporary conditions, and in so doing help, in the tradition of Lope K. Santos, Faustino Aguilar, Lazaro Francisco, and Amado V. Hernandez, fashion the consciousness of the race.